3: Wallace & Hoebel E-4, 5 (1933, 1945) 1952
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VI

From Cradle to Grave

THE Comanche infant was born into a world of adults who welcomed and cherished it. It was not looked upon as a nuisance or handicap, but rather as a valuable addition to the tribe. Girls were accepted, but boys were preferred. Some families made a practice of painting a black spot on the door of the tipi if a newborn child was a boy, as a means of informing the people that the tribe had been strengthened by the addition of another "brave." Although the motherly affection that was the child's due was bestowed upon both male and female, boys received greater care than girls from their mothers and more indulgence from both parents all along the line.

There is conflicting opinion about twins. The woman who bore twin boys might be honored; other parents might regard twins as unnatural. Sometimes the parents attempted to destroy one or both of them, particularly if one or both were girls, but the more common practice was to give one away if foster parents could be found. For fear her husband might destroy both, the mother would sometimes dispose of one and not inform her husband that she had given birth to twins. In the eighteen eighties Dr. George Holley discovered and saved an infant, which was one of twins, buried in sand by its mother. There is at least one other recorded instance of such a rescue.[1]

Infanticide also seems to have been practiced in case the infant was born deformed, diseased, or a weakling. The attending women

[1] Annie M. Barnes, *Matouchon: A Story of Indian Child Life*, 11.

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was made soft. Two pits were dug in the ground, one for the after- 844
birth and the other for heating water and steaming. One or more stakes about four feet long were driven into the ground by the bed for the patient to grasp as an aid in delivery. A supply of sage was brought in and hot coals were prepared. A medicine woman, middle-aged or older, was in attendance. One or more additional women were likely to be on hand to give assistance. No men came near. The woman normally lay on the bed, but when the pain seemed unbearable she walked around or squatted over the hole to grasp a stake. An attendant might try to aid nature by grasping the patient around the abdomen and exerting pressure. Hot rocks were placed against her back, and she was required to drink hot water or hot soup.

When births were prolonged and stubborn, a medicine man was 845
called in to take over. We have accounts of the actions of two medicine men who were called in such cases; one had buffalo power; the other, otter. The husband of Holding Her Sunshade, when called, asked for a buffalo hide with the tail on it. He drew a white "path" down the center of it with his fingers and placed it as a door on the childbirth tipi. The mother and father also had to wear buffalo robes with tails and the hair on the outside. The doctor entered the tipi holding a buffalo tail. He waved the tail in the mother's face and then made a motion as if he were going to vomit. He was bringing up his power. Next he breathed his power into the patient's mouth and spit in the midwife's hands, had her rub them together and rub the patient's abdomen. His power was now on her and inside of her. His work was done, and he walked around the fire and out the door. "The child should be born when he puts his second foot outside the door. He was successful, and although the family was poor, they gave him their best horse."

The otter medicine man, known to Post Oak Jim, worked a little differently. He had a tabu against any other pregnant woman's being about. His method was to pull his otter skin through his teeth from left to right, after which he drew the skin down the front of the woman's body. He fanned down her whole body with an eagle feather. He then fanned her lightly above her head. A medicine song was sung, and he was ready to leave with a flying leap through the door. "When his feet hit the ground outside the tipi, the child will be born."

The Comanches

845 The magical associations of buffalo hides with tails is not clear, but the effect of otter medicine is obvious. Otters like to slide down slippery mud banks. With similar ease the child will slide out. A conception of the birth lodge as a symbolic womb is also there. Just as the medicine man emerges through the door (vagina), so will the child.

846 When the baby was born, the doleful cries and monotonous songs of the attendants immediately changed to rejoicing. After the umbilical cord had been cut, the medicine woman wrapped it and hung it in a hackberry tree when one was convenient. If it was undisturbed before it rotted, the child was supposed to have a long and fortunate life. The medicine woman carried the afterbirth and threw it in a running stream (the purifier that nullifies power). The baby was bathed and wrapped in soft rabbit skins and placed in its cradle-board. The number of days the new mother remained in bed was set by the attending midwife. In recent times, ten days is considered the customary time needed for recovery, but there are cases on record where the woman had had serious difficulty and yet was on her feet going about her way before an attendant had washed and wrapped the baby. During the entire time of confinement no man except a doctor entered her tipi. The grandfather, however, always came right away to ask the sex of the child. He stood outside the lodge, and if it was a boy, the women within would call, "*ɛhaitsma*" ("It's your close friend"). If a girl, they simply say, "*ɜsamop'ma*" ("It's a girl"). The new mother was not allowed to eat a single bite of meat; "it makes blood and would cause hemorrhage." Each day sage was burned over the coals to purify the tipi. One of the first things the woman did when she got up from her bed was to bathe in running water. A proud father usually made it a point to give away something. Normally his generosity was limited to the first person who came to see the new baby. If it was a boy and the father well-to-do, the gift would be a horse.[23]

841 During menstruation a woman went into confinement. If her husband had medicine (and what man did not?), she could not sleep

[23] This description of childbirth is compiled from statements by informants Medicine Woman, Kills Something, and Post Oak Jim; also, House, *op. cit.*, 59; W. T. Corlett, *The Medicine Man of the American Indians* (report of a frontier surgeon stationed at Fort Sill in 1869), 269.

9: Gladwin E-5 (1940) 1948 NO6 Comanche NO6

though this was not invariable. There was apparently no ceremony connected with adoption. 597

An illegitimate child was a great shame to all members of the family, and especially to the girl's brother, whose prestige was to some extent a reflection of that of his family. It was usually brought up by the girl's mother, whom it would call mother. Some pressure was put on the boy by the girl's parents to marry her, but he could not be forced to do so. The girl's family referred to him teknonymously, but his family apparently did not recognize the relationship at all. Her marriage possibilities were somewhat reduced by this unfortunate happening, and she might well become only a secondary wife of some older man. 848 [558] [551]

Twins were not wanted, and were generally considered a danger to the mother, as well as to all her blood kin to a lesser degree. This was especially true as they grew up, suggesting the effects of the gradual emergence of the child's personality discussed above. Some women, with the assistance of powerful names for the children, disregarded this belief and raised them together, [184] hers disposed of the younger twin. If some woman did not come and [847] to take one, it might be laid outside the tipi somewhere, where someone invariably came to get it. The mother attempted to forget it. If one twin died, all the clothing and other things which had been prepared for it were buried with it, and the mother or her sister made a round of the camp collecting what was offered in the way of other clothes. 845

Among the parents' siblings, there is a definite emphasis on the mother's side. The mother's sisters were apt also to be married to one's father and, even if not, were usually around the family helping if possible. The mother's brother is also considered to be a source of guidance, assistance, and favors of fairly major proportions; it is significant that he, also, is permitted to give away a girl in marriage. As usual, behavior toward more distant parents, aunts and uncles depends on personality and propinquity; whether or not they have any children of their own is also often of importance. TY's father remained with her mother's family to marry two more sisters, so that she was brought up in the midst of a great number of maternal relatives. The members of this extended family were rather strikingly unprolific, so that she had very few even distant siblings; as a result she received a great deal of attention and an almost continuous stream of extremely valuable gifts from all her parents, aunts and uncles, even though related in very roundabout ways. Her younger brother, incidentally, became a favorite child according to the best institutionalized patterns. 604 593

Husband-Wife. Wives were very clearly dominated by their warrior-husbands, and acceded to their wishes in all matters, including the treatment of children. Men could, and often would, beat their wives on any pretext they chose, while a wife's infidelity frequently led to extremely harsh treatment, 593 684